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Executive Registry

90-4953

29 September 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Thoughts on the Succession in Egypt

1. For years few Egyptians have been able to imagine their country without Nasser. He had given the country, and them, an importance and a dignity they would not otherwise have had. When Nasser was shot at during a public meeting in 1954 he had won their hearts by shouting hysterically, "Go ahead and shoot me. You can't kill Nasser because all the Egyptian people will become Nassers." But they knew this was not so, and they will not expect to replace him. Nor will they expect the country to be the same.

2. Nasser died without designating a real successor. During the eighteen years since he led the revolt that disposed of King Farouk, Nasser has had many potential successors. Very few are still around. Nasser began as the chairman of a committee, the Revolution Command Council (RCC), made up of his principal revolutionary comrades. For some time this group ran Egypt with Nasser as primus inter pares. Over the years, however,

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members of the original RCC were banished one by one from the tight circle around the ever more powerful and authoritarian President. Nasser clearly hated to see his old friends go, but some of them he dismissed because of their own weaknesses or unreliability -- Saleh Salem and Khalid Muhieddin -- others because they were too strong minded to accept his increasing authority -- Latif el Boghdadi.

3. As the old RCC members disappeared, their places were taken by a new breed of technicians, mostly trained in American and British universities. These men have run the machinery of government well, considering everything, but have had almost no political appeal or role. Nasser's repeated attempts to create a meaningful political party, though absorbing an immense amount of time and effort, never affected the basics of power in Egypt. Nasser remained the source of all power, with the consent of the military and the technicians and the help of a powerful coterie of advisers. The Arab Socialist Union looked for a time as though it might be providing some political base for old RCC member and Presidential adviser, Ali Sabri. Since

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Sabri's heart attack late in 1967, however, his hold, and indeed his role in the party have come to an end and no one in the party leadership seems to be in a position to make a bid for power in the succession contest.

4. One other original RCC member stayed close to Nasser as long as Ali Sabri. This was Zacharia Muhieddin whom Nasser nominated as his successor when he offered his resignation after Egypt's ignominious defeat in 1967. There are those who believe the resignation was only a calculated gesture, but there are also strong reasons to believe it was genuine. In any event, he apparently felt a lingering resentment against Muhieddin, the man who might have replaced him. Muhieddin, according to a favorite journalists' cliché was the pro-American in Nasser's entourage while Ali Sabri was the pro-Soviet. The fact probably was simply that Muhieddin was less a socialist by nature than Ali Sabri and favored less rather than more government interference in the country's internal economic and social affairs. Nasser gave him a chance to try running the country his way for a time and apparently Muhieddin and Nasser, old personal friends though they were, found themselves in disagreement on many things. After the incident of Nasser's resignation in 1967 Muhieddin went off

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to his family village and has stayed there since, showing no signs of wanting to get back into the center of things. Ali Sabri has not been quite so far out of Nasser's favor. He was recently given a job said to be that of "head of the Air Force," but there is no evidence that he wields any power there.

5. Hakim Amr, Nasser's oldest friend and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces was actually Nasser's designated successor for many years. He reached the end of the line after the humiliation of his military machine by the Israelis in 1967. Recovering from his attempt at, or pretense of, resignation, Nasser took hold of the government after the defeat and charged that Hakim Amr and the high command had let the country down. Not accustomed to being made the scapegoat for their own failures, a number of military men, plus the Minister of Defense and the Director of the General Intelligence Agency, persuaded Hakim Amr to accept the leadership of a half-hearted move to displace Nasser. Amr's suicide, or poisoning, added to the humiliation of the military and left Nasser without a designated successor.

6. In the period after the 1967 defeat Nasser found himself for the first time without the reassuring presence of

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any of his old RCC comrades. Nasser, who began during this period to suffer more and more from his diabetes and related complaints, set about the job of restoring his command of the country. His biggest problem was the Army and the Air Force.

7. With massive Russian aid Nasser began the restoration and rehabilitation of his military forces. There were continuing personal problems between the Egyptian military and their Soviet advisers, but, like Nasser, the Egyptian officers were dependent on Soviet help and knew it. Gradually morale improved until the Israelis began their aggressive and destructive response to Nasser's "war of attrition." The inability of the Egyptian forces to meet the Israeli challenge again brought strained relations between them and Nasser. The influx of Soviet support and the buildup of the air defense system that began in March of this year, however, seems to have brought a certain return of confidence. Over the past few months the Commander in Chief, General Mohammad Fawsi, and a number of other senior officers seem to have been playing an increasingly important role in the affairs of the country and to have enjoyed increased Presidential support.

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The evidence seems to be that the Egyptian military is pretty well under the control of its commanders. There have been discontented groups, but the improvement in the military situation on the Canal in past months has probably reduced their number and their grievances.

8. Probably the most important men around Nasser at the time of his death were Sami Sharaf, the senior man in the Presidency and Mohammad Hassanein Heikal, the editor of Al Ahram and lately Minister of National Guidance. Sharaf has been at Nasser's elbow since 1955. He began with the job of selecting and processing the intelligence that went into his boss's In Box. Gradually he became his intelligence estimator and then his contact with all parts of the Government that produce information. During this period he said to an American visitor, while pointing to a picture of Nasser in a kind of shrine in the corner of his office, "I have given my life to that man." In time he became the man who controlled access to the President. His toughness, his contempt for the sycophants that grovelled before him, his passionate loyalty to his chief, must have been well known to Nasser. When the

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President went on an important trip it was Sharaf that went ahead to make arrangements. It was he that went onto the Presidential plane first when it arrived -- ahead of ministers and generals. Some of Nasser's magic is bound to have rubbed off on Sharaf, at least as far as his ability to make his voice heard in the counsels of those who try to decide what to do now. He seems an unlikely candidate for power, however. He has always been the dedicated servant of his hero. With

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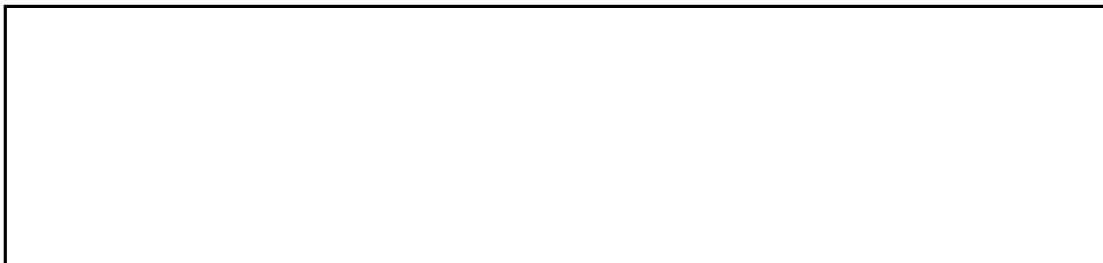
9. Hassanein Heikal will certainly retain some of the influence he has wielded as Nasser's friend and counsellor. He is, simply, just about the smartest man in Egypt. He is a gifted publicist and manipulator of public opinion. He is certainly among those who are even now consulting on the problem of finding an orderly way to provide for a successor. Heikal himself is likely to have made it clear that he is not a candidate for the top job and will serve, only reluctantly, on an interim council of government. Years ago when there was

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10. Among those who have been members of the fairly small circle of people whom Nasser knew and trusted are two others who seem likely to be among the group that makes the initial decisions with respect to the succession. They are the Minister of Interior, Sharawi Gumah, and Minister of State, Amin Huwaydi. Gumah, with the police and security services at his command, will almost certainly take part. Amin Huwaydi ~~has~~ has been around in various important jobs for some time and knows the other people who count. Still another name that should be considered is that of Hussein Shafei, an original member of the RCC and for a long time a minister, late a Vice President. Shafei will probably be consulted because he was an RCC member and never actually reached a parting of the ways with Nasser. He seems unlikely to push himself forward, however. One of the reasons he seems to have gotten along with Nasser longer than the others was that he was pliable and without personal ambition.

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11. Anwar Sadat, one of Nasser's earliest revolutionary friends and an original RCC member, is, of course, as head of the National Assembly the designated interim chief of state. He is required to see that the Assembly votes in sixty days on a successor. Sadat seems most unlikely to make a bid to take over permanently. [REDACTED] he indulged himself for years with such schemes as bringing about a Pan-Islamic union. As Nasser ran out of trustworthy senior colleagues he gave Sadat more and more work to do, most of his jobs being things nobody else wanted. [REDACTED]

12. Even if Anwar Sadat tries to preserve the impression that he intends to run the country until the National Assembly elects a successor, it is likely that he is now surrounded, and indeed had been since Nasser's death, with what is, in effect, the committee on the succession. It is possible that these men started tearing at each other's flesh the moment after Nasser died. There has been little recent evidence of tensions among the members of the inner circle around Nasser, however.

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These men have worked together and have shared loyalty and obligation to Nasser. On his death their common respect for their chief seems likely to assert itself. Anwar Sadat will have to listen to their counsel. He probably welcomes it.

13. The composition of the committee on the succession has already been suggested in the analysis above. It is likely to include Sharaf, Heikal, and Gumah. Then there should be General Muhammad Fawzi and two or three other senior officers to represent the military. If the committee is acknowledged openly there might be an official of the Arab Socialist Union or two for form's sake. One or two figures out of the past like Latif el Baghdadi or Hussein Shafei might be summoned to join in the deliberations. It is even possible that Ali Sabri and Zacharia Muhieddin might be asked to join. It seems more likely that Sharaf, Heikal, and Gumah, plus the military, will manage to keep the real decisions to themselves.

14. What is likely to happen in the kind of committee posited above? During the first deliberations it seems likely that its members will join together in affirming their desire to see that the country carry on along the lines drawn by the fallen leader.

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They, and indeed most Egyptians, will be outdoing each other for days and weeks in their profession of loyalty to Nasser and what he stood for. No candidates for the Presidency are likely to press forward until they take the measure of the competition. [REDACTED]

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15. The easiest way out of the problem that faces the group around Sadat would be simply to turn things over to the military, make Fawzi or some other senior officer President on the understanding that all keep their jobs and influence. This calculation is based on the assumption that there is no junta of radical young officers waiting to make a bid for power and no ambitious civilian who has tasted power at Nasser's elbow and who thinks he can call out enough support -- military, police, and public -- to carry the day. Both these assumptions seem likely, but this is on the basis of lack of evidence, not positive knowledge.

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16. A big unknown in the situation is the capability and the intentions of the Russians. With their immense investment in the country and their knowledge of Nasser's health, they must have planned against the contingency of his death. On balance, despite their access to Egyptians, particularly military personnel, it seems unlikely that they would have taken the risks involved in preparing to manipulate the succession. Even if they have control of key people, it seems unlikely that they would try to use them to dictate the succession. What is more likely is that they have done all possible to make as many friends as they can wherever it might do some good. (Some of these are certainly in Soviet pay or under threat of blackmail.) What the Soviets must hope is that the people who take power after Nasser will be at least as dependent on them and as aware of their dependence as Nasser was.

17. If some kind of committee or council of the kind described above remains in effective power in Egypt for a time, it seems likely to be preoccupied with internal problems and disposed to postpone other decisions or actions. No committee

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or spokesman for such a committee is likely openly to proclaim a departure from Nasser's Arab policies. No one is likely to announce the intention of turning Egypt inward, but this seems a likely development anyhow, and one that would meet with the silent approval of the majority, probably even including much of the military.

18. There is clearly too little evidence of the forces at work in Egypt in the aftermath of Nasser's death to make a confident estimate as to the kind of rule that will succeed his. Analysis of the power situation in the country, of the principal characters likely to be involved in the decision on the succession, and of the mood of the country, makes some kind of collective leadership seem the most likely. A single figure might be selected to assume the Presidential office, but he would probably be beholden to a group of Nasser's closest associates and heirs, for a time at least. Competition for power would probably very soon develop among the small group at the top, but there is no present evidence of anyone with the ambition and the support to make a respectable bid for sole power.

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director

Here are [redacted] first thoughts about what happens now in Egypt. He has placed a good deal of emphasis on his personal impressions of the dramatis personae and has speculated freely on how they will interact.

We have made no attempt to perfect or coordinate this, thinking that at this point you wanted this kind of impressionistic analysis.

When we have more evidence to go on we shall set our hand to a more conventional ONE memo on the outlook in Egypt. Good

ABBOT SMITH 29 September 1970
Director, National Estimates (DATE)

Memo: "Thoughts on the Succession in Egypt" 29 Sep 70

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